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FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0633

INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0022

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000020

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/18/2017

TAGS: PHUM SOCI PREL PGOV CM VM VT

SUBJECT: VATICAN: VIETNAM AND CHINA CHURCH ISSUES FRONT AND CENTER

REF: A) VATICAN 0004 B) VATICAN 0005

CLASSIFIED BY: Peter G. Martin, A/DCM, AMEMB VATICAN, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Holy See intends to hold meetings on January 19 and 20 with key Catholic officials to formulate a common policy toward China in response to the recent illicit ordinations by the GoC. In related news, unofficial Vatican sources have confirmed that Pope Benedict will receive Vietnamese Prime Minister D?ng on January 25 in the first-ever meeting between a GoV official and a pope. Dung's visit is an important building block in the establishment of full relations between Vietnam and the Holy See, but is likely part of a lengthy process rather than a move that will lead to an overnight breakthrough. End Summary.

Holy See Meets to Formulate Common Policy toward China

¶2. (C) The Holy See's Press Office announced January 18 that the Holy See will convene a meeting Friday and Saturday, January 19 and 20, to consider the situation of the Catholic Church in China. The meeting will be presided over by Cardinal Secretary of State Bertone and will, according to our sources, include other members of the Secretariat of State, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, along with high level Church officials from China including Cardinal Joseph Zen of Hong Kong.

¶3. (C) Vatican-affiliated China expert Father Bernardo Cervellera, editor of Asia News Service, told PolOff January 18 that the purpose of the meeting is to form a common policy toward China in light of recent events including the last illicit ordination which occurred in December 2006. Cervellera opines that the Holy See meeting is to determine, *inter alia*, how to treat the bishops ordained illicitly and how to address China's role in these events. Cervellera believes one outcome of the meetings will be the creation of a permanent commission to deal with Chinese issues.

Holy See - Vietnam: Another Step Toward Diplomatic Relations?

¶4. (C) According to Asia News, unofficial Vatican sources have confirmed that Pope Benedict will receive Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguy?n T?n D?ng on January 25 in what is the first meeting between a top government official from that country and a pope. The unofficial sources indicate the GoV confirmed January 18 the original date of January 25 to the Vatican.

¶5. (C) Cervellera told PolOff January 18 that Vietnam wants to use this visit to bolster their image within the world community and to encourage investment and foreign assistance from the

outside by demonstrating that Vietnam is modernizing and becoming more liberal. Cervellera expects this visit to be an important building block in the normalization of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Vietnam.

Comment

¶6. (C) The confirmed visit by the Vietnamese Prime Minister to the Vatican is a significant step in the continuing improvement of relations between the Holy See and Vietnam. Seen in the context of the Holy See's continuing outreach to the GoV (a March 2007 delegation to Vietnam will continue the Vatican's efforts on this front), the meeting could edge the two sides closer to the establishment of full diplomatic relations.

¶7. (C) We expect the process to establish diplomatic relations between Vietnam and the Holy See, however, to be lengthy. As is the case with China, there are intermediate steps that would likely take place before full relations will be established between the two sides. Contacts have also told us that the establishment of relations with Vietnam is not unrelated to the establishment of relations with China. Regional experts have told us that it is unlikely that Vietnam would establish full relations with the Holy See before seeing further progress in the China - Holy See relationship.

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